Meeting German Business Partners
A Brief Introduction to German Business Culture and Etiquette
German Business Culture in General

Language

- The official language is German. If you do not speak German, you can try to communicate in English, since most German businessmen have a good command of English. If not, a professional interpreter is essential for successful negotiations.

Business Appointment

- The **best time** to schedule a business appointment would be between 09:00 am and 5:00 pm.

- On the appointment, you should bring **plenty business cards**. They should include your full title, position and university degrees.

- Be aware that Germans are not impressed by **flashy advertising** or memorable slogans on your promotional material.

- Germans regard **business strictly separated from personal relationships**, so joking or changing topics may leave an unprofessional impression.

- Germans are very detail oriented and will certainly be **well prepared and informed on meetings**. That is why they expect the same from you.

- The **meeting will begin quickly**. You will probably be asked many questions. It is best to have the answers. Germans tend to base decisions on logic, and they will see a flashy, smoke-and-mirrors presentation for what it is.
Arriving on a Meeting

Punctuality

- Germans are very punctual. Arrive on time for every appointment, whether for business or social. It is important to arrive for a meeting exactly at the time determined or apologize if you are late.
- Being late, even if it is only by a few minutes, is very insulting to a German executive and could mean a shaky start to any potential business relations.

Greeting

- Shaking hands is the established form of greeting. A brief handshake in business situations is an accepted custom at the start and end of a meeting. When you meet someone, make sure you greet him by shaking hands. Additionally, you should maintain eye contact while greeting him or her.

Dress

- Germans prefer wearing formal business clothing.
- Businessmen will wear formal dark suits, white or blue shirts and solid, conservative ties.
- Businesswomen also dress conservatively, in dark suits and white blouses. Women are recommended to avoid being flashy, especially with large, expensive jewelry or perfumes.
- This form of dress is observed even in warm weather, you should not remove your tie or jacket before a German colleague does so.
During a Meeting

Addressing Business Partners

- If you plan to practice some German beforehand, you should make sure to know the difference between the polite form of ‘you’ (‘Sie’) and the informal form (‘Du’). One should always remember to only use the formal pronoun "Sie" when talking to people.
- Germans address each other with Herr/Frau (Mr./Mrs.) ‘last name’, even when they know each other very well, it is not customary to use each others first names.
- A person’s academic title is important to Germans, especially in business communication. You should do your best to address people by their full, correct title.

Conversations

- Germans are very outspoken and don’t find it hard to say “No”, “I can’t”, or "This is impossible". Don’t take this as an offense.
- Stand your ground, respectfully. Interruptions are common in business conversation, and often the most tenacious talker wins. If you feel your point must be heard, keep at it.
- If you are interrupted while answering a question, take that as a sign that your answer was sufficient and needs no further detail, and move on.
After a Meeting

Privacy

• To Germans, private life is very important, so do not phone a German executive at home without permission.

Decision making process

• The German thought process is extremely thorough, with each aspect of a project being examined in great detail. This process is often very time-intensive. However, once the planning is over, a project will move very quickly and deadlines are expected to be honored.

• German executives tend to be analytical thinkers, requiring lots of facts and examples from the other side to support their position.

• German businesspeople tend to be traditionally cautious of new ideas and concepts. Institutional change comes very slowly and often quite reluctantly.

• Germans do not like surprises. Sudden changes in business transactions, even if they may improve the outcome, are rather unwelcome.

• Flexibility and spontaneity are not common traits in German business culture.